

Sunday School

HEROES OF FAITH.

June 13, 1909. Heb. 11:1-3, 17-29.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."—Heb. 11:1.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 59. Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly Sabbath?

A. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly Sabbath, and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian Sabbath.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Heb. 11:1-12.

T.—Heb. 11:13-31.

W.—Heb. 11:32-40.

Th.—Neh. 2:11-20.

F.—Dan. 6:1-10.

S.—Heb. 12:1-13.

S.—Rom. 8:31-39.

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

Faith, Its Nature and Triumphs—

What faith is, vs. 1-3.

What faith has done, vs. 17-29.

LESSON COMMENTS.

The lesson is from the unsigned letter to the Hebrews. Who the author was is unknown. Paul, Silas, Barnabas and others prominent in the early Church have been credited with its authorship by various Christian writers.

Salvation by faith was preached as the Gospel. Salvation by circumcision and the Mosaic ritual was the threatening heresy. What is faith? is a question men have ever been prone to give an incompetent answer. James said the answer must include the words "vital" and "operative." This writer says there must also be included the word "confidence."

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for." "The giving substance to the things hoped for" is perhaps a better reading. Our hopes are visionary and illusory, or they are substantial and real as we have dead or living faith. Are we dreaming day dreams and building air castles, or are our hopes as real and substantial as the things we are at present dealing with?

"Faith is the evidence of things not seen." Unseen and future things may be dreams of realities. Facts admit of proof. What is the proof? Circumstantial evidence is not the best, yet many rely on it with greater certainty concerning unseen things, and things hoped for. Hearsay testimony is not admissible when we are seeking incontrovertible proof. Faith is the evidence. Unless faith is proof, it lacks an important element of true faith. Unless we do believe in these unseen things as firmly and with the same assurance as we do in the seen and substantial things around us, we are lacking in one of the essential qualities of the Christian faith.

"For therein the elders had witness borne to them." The saints of former times got their information through this source.

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." Through this same source we, as well as the ancients, got most of our information. Faith is proof to all men of most things, only the Christian accepts it also for spiritual things.

"We understand" many things "by faith." It is a matter of knowledge with us that God created all things by the word of His power. We know comparatively little about the material and visible universe. But we do know some things, and we know them by faith; and we also know some things about the spiritual and unseen universe in the same way. Blot out of

knowledge the verities that rest on the witness of faith and very little is left. Doubt and uncertainty, wavering and indecision are elements of weakness. Doubt is no doubt useful for sifting and separating between the illusions and delusions, and the substances and realities of faith, between rational and superstitious beliefs; but unless the sifting leaves a residue of things assured of, the man is of no use in the world. The heroes are all men of faith, and their faith is of such type as that the things hoped for and unseen are as real as the granite mountains to them.

Call the roll and see if it be not so. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." It had been said to him, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." He believed it. He believed it in the same fashion as he believed the evidences of his senses as he touched and tasted and saw the things he handled. He knew that Isaac would beget children through whom should descend the promised inheritance. Yet he was ready to plunge the sacrificial knife in his heart and burn his body on the altar. He was not troubled about the matter. His faith did not stagger. He knew that he and the boy would come down together from that mountain. To him God's promise was a certainty. Faith receives a promissory note as money, a title deed as property. Abraham held the title and was satisfied. He doubtless wondered just how God would proceed in the matter of fulfilling His promise. At one time he seems to have thought that God would provide a substitute sacrifice for Isaac. But he felt sure that God could call Isaac back to life, even after his body had been burnt. And doubtless that is what he thought would happen. But he had no suspicion of God and no thought that Isaac's earthly career was then to end.

"Whence also he received him in a figure." That is, "in a parable"—not "so to speak," "figuratively speaking." Abraham understood that this was no whimsical command of God. It had a great purpose, and he learned that he was acting a parable. We know the interpretation of that parable. It may be that on that occasion "Abraham saw my day, and was glad."

Isaac blessed his sons, dividing to them an inheritance, with the same feeling of assurance that any man has who makes a will and bequeaths land to his heirs. He was giving away future things, but to him they were real things, not doubtful wishes for the future. Jacob did the same thing. Joseph arranged for his burial in a distant time with the same confidence a man does who knows he owns a certain lot in a certain cemetery. He not only hoped his people would some day leave Egypt, his hope was based on a knowledge of the future, which knowledge came by faith.

Moses' parents had faith and were not therefore "afraid of the King's commandment." It is usual to picture them in great fear and distress. Not so; they were acting on knowledge of the future based on faith. It does not appear their faith had any more solid foundation than that their baby was beautiful. They perhaps believed the child would be preserved because he was so beautiful. The point is, they believed with a faith that was the substance of things hoped for, and therefore acted fearlessly.

"Moses, when he was come to years" acted neither as a fool nor a visionary in refusing an Egyptian career and casting his lot deliberately with the Hebrew race. He understood enough of the future, by faith, to determine which course offered most to him. Step by step his career showed that he had undoubting confidence. He saw the invisible. He knew, in part, the end from the beginning.

These all had exceptional opportunities to know God and His will, we think. We have better opportunities to know God and His will. True, He does not speak to us as individuals and so make us special promises and set us special tasks. But for all that we have greater reason to know than they had the great plans and purposes of God for us and what He requires from us. Let us have the true faith!

W. D. Hedleston.